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incimate' Committee of Citizens -
Decline and Fall of the Public
Library of Cincinnati.

Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Cincinnati N. Y.

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LIBRARY

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CINCINNATI. NO. 1.

THE DECLINE AND FALL

OF THE

Public Library of Cincinnati.

I.

THE DECLINE.

The Public Library, when instituted, with, of which the city was 11 be the only one."

*Rufus King, in his Report as President of the Board of Trustees
and Visitors of the Common Schools of Cincinnati for the
year ending June 30, 1841.*

"But now two sets of well-trained men, the hunters of the forest, the
the choicest trappings, the choicest, the choicest, the choicest, the choicest,
birds find it in the nest of eagles, and the shily kite, sits on the perch of
the hawk."

Richard D. Webb, in his Letter to the Board.

CINCINNATI



2737
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CINCINNATI.—NO. 1.

THE DECLINE AND FALL

OF THE

Public Library of Cincinnati.

I.

THE DECLINE.

The Public Library—"an institution, without which no city would be honorable."

*Rufus King, in his Report as President of the Board of Trustees
and Visitors of the Common Schools of Cincinnati, for the
year ending June 30, 1861.*

"But now (we say it with sorrow) base Thersites handles the arms of Achilles ;
the choicest trappings are thrown away upon lazy asses ; blinking night-
birds lord it in the nests of eagles ; and the silly kite sits on the perch of
the hawk."

Richard de Bury, On the Love of Books.

CINCINNATI.

Published by a Committee of Citizens.

1886.

TO THE
BOARD OF MANAGERS
OF THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY,
AND TO THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION
OF THE
CITY OF CINCINNATI,

The following facts and considerations
are respectfully submitted
by the Committee.

PREFACE.

More than a year ago, it was forced upon the attention of some citizens that certain departments of our system of public education were in a condition to awaken serious apprehension. A committee was constituted; the quiet investigation of facts was begun, has continued ever since, and has resulted in revealing a state of affairs even more deplorable than at first appeared. The Committee has, therefore, resolved to make a public statement to those authorities on whom it is incumbent to provide a remedy for such curable evils as are manifest in the system. It is, however, far from the purpose or desire of the Committee to censure or disparage the whole because some of the parts are defective in action or infected with disorder.

There has, doubtless, been too much wholesale condemnation and abuse of the management of our educational institutions. Let actual defects be exhibited without fear or favor; let blame fall where it is due. And when the seat of the evil is recognized, let the wise physician heal, where healing is possible; and where it is not, let the skilful surgeon mercifully cut off the diseased members rather than permit the whole body to suffer and finally to perish from corruption.

The Committee is aware that it is usual to resort to the newspapers for the purpose of such discussions. They have departed from this custom for various reasons, prominent among which was the desire to put such facts and arguments as they have to offer into convenient form for reference. They are fully persuaded, nevertheless, that there will be no lack of persons (and the less information they possess, the readier they will be) "to rush into print" where it costs nothing, for the purpose of defending what is indefensible. Should the Committee, however, deem it necessary for the public good, they will also avail themselves of the courtesies of the press, in order to supplement and reinforce what they have determined to present in another form.

The present pamphlet relates exclusively to the Public Library and its recent management, and will be followed by another on the same subject. These will be succeeded by others on other departments of our school system.

RETROSPECT.

The history of the Public Library of Cincinnati may be conveniently divided into five periods :

I. PERIOD. From the organization of the Ohio School Library to the enactment of the laws (in the spring of 1867) under which the Public Library is now administered. Librarians : John D. CALDWELL, from May 28, 1855, to March 16, 1857 ; N. Peabody POOR, from October 1857 to early in 1866 ; Lewis FREEMAN, from early in 1866.

II. PERIOD. From the spring of 1867 to the opening of the Library temporarily in the front part of the present building, December, 1870. Librarians : Lewis FREEMAN, until November, 1869 ; W. F. POOLE from November 15, 1869.

III. PERIOD. From December, 1870, to December 31, 1873. Librarian : W. F. POOLE.

IV. PERIOD. From January 1, 1874 to December 31, 1879. Librarian : Thomas VICKERS.

V. PERIOD. From January 1, 1880 to the present time. Librarian : Chester W. MERRILL.

Just a generation ago (1853) the first step was taken by the General Assembly of Ohio toward the establishment of free public libraries as a part of the common school system of the State. The beginning was not very auspicious. The provisions of the law had not been well considered, and it was not well adapted to the purpose for which it had been enacted. The enterprise itself did not fail to awaken the animosity of many who thought themselves already sufficiently taxed for the support of public education. The law provided for a state tax of one tenth of a mill on the dollar valuation, and the Commissioner of Common Schools was to apply the proceeds to the purchase of books and school apparatus, and was to distribute the same among the several districts of the State.

Cincinnati was at that time divided into eighteen school districts ; and consequently, eighteen libraries, exactly alike, were sent here for distribution. The school board, however, considered, that

"the establishment of a library in every school district would be a wasteful multiplication of the same books", and refused to receive them. Subsequently an arrangement was made by which several libraries were to be opened in different parts of the city. But, "on more mature reflection", the board resolved (December 18, 1855), that there should be *one* library for all the public schools of Cincinnati and for all those entitled to use it; and that this library should be kept in the building where the school offices were situated and the sessions of the board were held. The State Commissioner (at that time, Mr. H. H. BARNEY,) acquiesced, and he together with Mr. Rufus KING, (then president of the school board) selected and purchased some 3000 volumes, which formed the original nucleus of the present magnificent collection, and they were set up in a room in the old Central School House on Longworth street, where the board then had its offices and held its meetings.

Soon afterward (July 31, 1856) an arrangement was made with the Directors of the Ohio Mechanics' Institute for the consolidation of the Institute Library with the School Library, and a new home was provided in the Institute building on the corner of Sixth and Vine streets. Meanwhile (April, 1856,) the state tax had been suspended for one year; but the Library was established, nevertheless; and Cincinnati owes a debt of lasting gratitude to such men as Dr. C. G. COMEGYS, Rufus KING and John D. CALDWELL (the first Public Librarian,) for the tireless energy and devotion with which they labored to set the infant institution on its feet.

The Library was popular from the beginning. The very first year, the circulation was over 20,000 volumes, and by the end of the third year it had already increased to 60,000. Still the institution labored under many vicissitudes and disadvantages. The tax was again suspended in 1857, and in 1860 the law providing for it was repealed. The seven succeeding years were a constant struggle for existence. The public were appealed to again and again for funds, and many (whose names deserve to be written in letters of gold) came forward with generous contributions. Concerts, exhibitions, and lectures were given for the benefit of the Library, and noble men and women vied with each other in the effort to sustain it. The terrible period of the war, when every energy of the people was engaged in maintaining our national integrity, weighed heavily upon "the people's college"; and yet it is worth noting, that in the four years ending June 30, 1865, the circulation of books had been 334,360 volumes. No sooner, however, was the national conflict well over,

than the interest in the Library awoke again, and the effort to place it upon a firm and permanent foundation was renewed with even more than pristine vigor. The Library Committee, of which the Rev. J. M. WALDEN was chairman for the two years *) immediately preceeding the organization of the present Board of Managers, was exceedingly judicious, farsighted, and successful in the measures it adopted. They "*deemed it right and equitable,*" they said, "*to have a free library for the people, increased and perpetuated by a public tax.*" And it was largely owing to the persistent exertions of this committee, and of its chairman in particular, that the present library laws were enacted by the General Assembly on March 18, and April 3, 1867.

At last the existence of the Library was assured, and far-reaching plans for its future development were formed. Nevertheless, it was still to take years before the full fruition of labor and hope began to be realized. The period between the spring of 1866 and the end of 1870 was one of transition, and of very moderate usefulness. For nearly three years no circulation or use of books was recorded, and from March 10, 1868, to December 31, 1870, (two years and nearly ten months) the total use of books, both at home and in the library, was only 120,583 volumes. Two things, however, had been done to prepare the way for more satisfactory results. In August, 1868, the Handy Opera House property was bought for \$83,000, and the erection of the present Library building was immediately begun; and then, on Nov. 16, 1869, Mr. William F. POOLE, of Boston, a gentleman of large experience with libraries, was elected Librarian. Already in fifteen months, from the time of the purchase, the front building had been made ready for the temporary accommodation of the Library, and it was thrown open to the public on December 8, 1870, having four reading rooms, a general delivery room, and about 30,000 volumes. During the entire administration of Mr. Poole the Library remained in these quarters, pending the completion of the main and intermediate buildings. From this time forward the Library grew in public favor as never before. The circulation of books increased immensely. Indeed, it seemed to be the chief aim of the new librarian to promote to the fullest possible extent the external use of books, and he seemed inclined to measure the popular-

*) The Library Committee of the Board of Education in 1865-66 consisted of the Rev. J. M. WALDEN, the Rev. H. M. STORRS, S. S. FISHER, James F. IRWIN, and Hermann ECKEL; and in 1866-67 of the Rev. J. M. WALDEN, James F. IRWIN, Hermann ECKEL, Robert BROWN, JR., and Thos. L. HARPER.

ity and efficiency of the Library by the number of volumes borrowed for home reading. Whether this is the sole, or even the best, criterion of usefulness, we shall have occasion to consider further on ; but whatever the conclusion on this point may be, there can be no question as to the success of Mr. Poole's administration. His resignation was a cause of regret to many of the best friends of the Library. During the three years ending December 31, 1873, the total use of books was 773,251 volumes. In the four years ending with the same date 40,671 volumes had been added to the Library. Thus, when Mr. Thomas VICKERS, the successor of Mr. POOLE, took charge, (January 1, 1874,) the total number of volumes was 62,454.

To Mr. VICKERS fell the task of transferring the Library to its permanent home in the alcoves of the Main Hall, after the building was finished ; which involved the re-classification and re-location of the whole collection, in accordance with a system that was at once scientific, practical and expansive. The dedication of the new building took place February 25, 1874, with appropriate ceremonies ; the Hon. George H. PENDLETON making the principal address.

In what spirit and with what success the Library was administered during this period may be indicated to some extent by the judgment of persons from abroad who visited it, and who took occasion to express themselves publicly concerning it. Prominent among a large number of such was the late Dr. C. L. BERNAYS, of St. Louis, a man of thorough scientific and literary training and with extensive personal knowledge of the character and workings of all the principal libraries of this country and of Europe. On December 8, 1877, he published in the *Cincinnati Volksfreund* an article from which the following is an extract :

" I have spent some hours in your Public Library with unspeakable pleasure. This is the real diadem of the Queen of the West. And here it is not merely the magnificence and solidity of the building, (for everywhere in this country far too much money is squandered and too many oppressive debts are incurred for mere stone walls), nor is it even the multitude of books, but it is the ideal library become real and actual, the order and the system, in a word, the organic life, which astonishes us at every turn in this beautiful institution. This is not a mere heap of dead or ephemeral rubbish, accidentally or arbitrarily raked together, with lavish expenditure, by ignorant hands ; on the contrary, you have here in very truth the intellectual labors of the human race, systematically arranged and offered free of charge, in the most accessible and convenient form conceivable,

for the education and edification of a populous city. Here scientific and æsthetic judgment, united with practical skill, has organized and arranged the first genuine public library in the West — a library, in which may be found thousands of novels and romances, it is true ; but which also furnishes the educated merchant, manufacturer, and mechanic a guide through all the provinces of necessary knowledge, and unlocks for the student of every science and art all the sources of learning in the history of human development. If other cities pride themselves on having the longest bridge or the highest elevators, Cincinnati, of *all* the cities of the West, may boast of having the richest, the best arranged, and the most generally useful library ; and, of a truth, it will be seen in the course of time that your library is the surest and safest bridge to prosperity, and the best elevator of public morals.”

On the 23rd of the same month (Dec. 1877,) there appeared in the *Illinois Staatszeitung*, (Chicago,) a closely printed article of more than two columns in length, also under the signature of Dr. BERNAYS, which was devoted to a most laudatory description of the Public Library of Cincinnati. It concluded as follows :

“Here I close this brief, cursory, and imperfect report concerning one of the finest institutions in the whole country. Within this institution everything is order and system—means and end in beautiful proportion,—a living, delightful organic whole,—unity and connection in all its parts, and with the public at large ; and whatever has not been done hitherto, or not done so completely as in the older centers of civilization and learning, will infallibly yet be done in such manner as is here necessary and profitable.* For here, in addition to permanent and ample pecuniary resources, there is an untiring industry and special qualifications for the accomplishment of the great task, namely, the foundation and preservation of a Treasury of the progressive intellectual achievements of mankind, and the creation of organic relations between it and the people. (The Chief Librarian, Mr. Thomas VICKERS, is not a mere book-buyer and book-circulator, but a scholar who is thoroughly familiar with the whole range of literature.) The very fact, that a city like Cincinnati has so much self-respect as to found and support such an institution from public funds, is an honor of which every other city in the West has reason to envy her.”

FACTS FOR COMPARISON.

The question now is, has the Public Library of Cincinnati maintained its former high character under the administration of Mr. Chester W. MERRILL, which began upon Mr. VICKERS' resignation, January 1, 1880? Has the growth of the Library been what it ought to have been with the funds at its disposal? Has its usefulness increased in proportion to its growth, and in proportion to the expenditure of money for its maintenance? Are the tone and *morale* of the present management such as to encourage the friends of the Library and the public generally to hope for better things if that management were to be continued? That these are vital questions, everyone will concede. And as these questions are answered in the affirmative or in the negative, the verdict will be for or against the present regime. There can be no excuses; no apologies for want of success; for this is one of the instances where qualification must be measured by the result. *Magistratus virum indicat*—the office reveals the man—is a maxim of wider application than the merely legal one.

An institution like our Public Library has in its very constitution all the elements of growth and progress. An ever-increasing intensity of purpose and an ever-widening sphere of influence are inseparable from the healthy action of its organism. By the very nature of such an organism its movement must be a forward one, unless it becomes diseased or crippled. With such a fund, such appliances, and such popularity, there ought to be no such thing as going from good to bad, and from bad to worse—the Library ought to go from good to better constantly. Each administration should be an improvement upon its predecessor, and should also improve upon itself as the years roll on. *An administration, for instance, that has been in office six years, should in the last three of them exhibit a marked improvement upon the first three.* If it does not, and does not even hold its own, there must be a fatal defect in it. Let us now proceed to apply this to the case in hand, as regards 1) the use of books, 2) the increase of the library, and 3) the expense of maintenance.

I. THE USE OF BOOKS.

During the last fifteen years, from January 1, 1871, to December 31, 1885, the total use of books, according to the official record, had been at the end of each three years as follows :

LIBRARIAN.	THREE YEARS.	ENDING.	NO. OF VOLS.
POOLE	Last	Dec. 31, 1873..	773,251
VICKERS	First	Dec. 31, 1876..	872,402
VICKERS	Last	Dec. 31, 1879..	1,107,553
MERRILL	First	Dec. 31, 1882..	1,132,135
MERRILL	Last	Dec. 31, 1885..	1,107,447

It will be seen that during the last three years of Librarian VICKERS' administration the use of books was 334,302 volumes more than during the last three years of his predecessor's, and 235,151 volumes more than during the first three years of his own ; *while during the last three years of Librarian MERRILL's administration the use of books was not only less (by 106 volumes) than during his predecessor's last three years, but even 24,688 volumes less than in the first three years of his own term of office.*

During the first five years of Mr. MERRILL's administration the "home use" of books fell off 61,745 volumes ; and even in the last year (1885) after he had recovered 20,650 volumes of the loss, it was still 17,394 volumes less than in the last year of his predecessor (1879). His net loss in the "home use" of books in six years was 41,095 volumes ; and his last three years, as compared with the first three, show a loss of 81,443 volumes. If this is painful to him, he is careful not to show it. In his last Annual Report, on the contrary, he would have the public understand that "*the steady increase from year to year in the use of the consultation department*" is particularly gratifying, as the use of this department best shows the real value of a library to the community." Alas ! there has been no such "steady increase" since Mr. MERRILL became Librarian. His predecessor might, indeed, have boasted of such, for from 1874 to 1879 the gain in the internal use of the Library was 98,419 volumes, an average of 19,648 for each year ; while under Mr. MERRILL there was a "steady" decrease for three consecutive years, and the total gain which he has made in this department during six years (22,753 volumes) is much smaller than the gain in the single year 1876, which was 37,053 volumes.

And as it is with the "home use" and the "library use", so it is with the "total use". At the end of Mr. MERRILL's third year the total circulation of books had fallen off 65,661 volumes; and of this, during the next three years, he only recovered 47,319 volumes, leaving him 18,342 volumes worse off than he was in the beginning. His predecessor circulated 108,601 volumes more in his last year (1879) than he did in his first (1874.)

Thus far we have left out of the account an important factor. We have said nothing of the increased capital which Mr. MERRILL has had to draw upon for his circulation. According to the Annual Reports, however, the average number of volumes in the Library from 1874 to 1879 was 89,013, while from 1880 to 1885 the average number was 131,420; or an average of 42,407 volumes (47.64 per cent.) more in the latter period than in the former. Now, as already suggested, the use of a public library, if it is successfully managed, will keep pace with the increase of books (and of expenses.) But this is not the case with the Public Library of Cincinnati under Mr. MERRILL's administration. Before his time, increase of books and increased use of books went hand in hand. The Library was transferred to him in the best possible condition for farther progress. But the more books he accumulates, and the more money he spends, the worse the public is off.

It may be added parenthetically, that what has been said of the use and circulation of books, is true likewise of the use of periodicals. The increase in this department was 314,130 in the year 1879 over the year 1874; and in no year since 1879 has the use of periodicals been as great as it was then. The very first year under the present Librarian it decreased 48,591.

Should it occur to Mr. MERRILL (or any of his partisans) to say that, after all, according to the foregoing table, the absolute total circulation of books during his six years of office ending December 31, 1885, was greater by 259,627 volumes than was the total circulation during the six years of his predecessor, there are two things to be remarked in reply:

1. One of the last things his predecessor did was to establish and open two Branch Libraries, one at Cumminsville and the other at Columbia, the whole usufruct of which, so far as circulation is concerned, fell to Mr. MERRILL. Had it not been for the help which these Branches gave him, the fiasco which he has made as Librarian would have been even more apparent than it is; which probably ex-

plains the fact that in his annual reports for 1883 and 1884 the statistics of the Columbia Branch make no separate appearance, though in 1883 he says it "continues to do good work." The simple fact is, that during the existence of these branches (and it is one of the many disastrous consequences of an entire lack of energy and executive ability on the part of the Librarian that they no longer exist,) they circulated more than 100,000 volumes; which did good service in swelling the apparent circulation of the Central Library. Then

2. It may not be amiss to state that the total circulation of books during Mr. VICKERS' librarianship was greater by 622,923 volumes than the circulation of the whole 17 years of previous library history, including the whole of Mr. POOLE's period. The comparison of these figures may possibly suggest something as to what the increase would have been, had Mr. VICKERS been succeeded by a competent Librarian.

We may here say, that we are far from believing that the only true measure of the usefulness of a public library is to be found in the number of books taken from it to be read at home. Most of the great libraries of the world have practically no out-door circulation. The door of the reading room of the British Museum is guarded by a policeman on each side, in order to make sure that no reader takes a book away. No one, whatever be his station in life, is permitted to leave the building with a closed bag or portfolio, in which a book might possibly be secreted. One of the regulations (RULE 16) provides that any reader taking a book, manuscript, map, or other property out of the library shall be dealt with according to law.

Thus a library may certainly be great and useful without lending any of its books for home use; and it must also be admitted that a large percentage of the books read within the library belong to a better class of literature than most of those given out. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the Public Library of Cincinnati was organized to meet the wants of both in- and out-door readers; and that those who read its books at home have quite as good a claim to the recognition and consideration of their rights and needs as those whose convenience it better suits, or whom the rules of the Library compel, to read or consult its books within the building. And while the home use of books may be neither the sole nor the highest criterion of library usefulness, a marked and continued decline in the lending department of such a library as ours can not be viewed otherwise than with alarm.

II. THE INCREASE OF THE LIBRARY.

The following table shows the comparative increase of the Library under the present Librarian and under his predecessor, and shows how the books were acquired ; whether by purchase, gift, or deposit.

BOOKS ADDED to LIBRARY.	Jan. 1, 1874, to Dec. 31, 1879.	Jan. 1, 1880, to Dec. 31, 1885.	MORE in First Period.
Bought.....	42,261 vols.	25,508 vols.	16,753 vols.
Given	8,687 "	5,090 "	3,597 "
Deposited	5,392 "	1,594 "	3,798 "
Total.....	56,340 "	32,192 "	24,148 "
Deduct worn out	4,041 "	3,611 "	— —
Net increase	52,299 "	28,581 "	23,718 "

It will be seen from these figures, that, not only in the circulation of books, but also in the acquisition of them there has been a remarkable falling off. During Mr. MERRILL's administration the average number of volumes added each year has been 5,365 ; while under Mr. VICKERS it was 9,390, or nearly twice as many. Nor can it be said, that the great diminution has been owing to want of funds. For, in the first place, when the former Librarian left, there was a balance in the city Treasury, to the credit of the " Library Book Fund ", of \$12,020.83 ; and the appropriations from that fund between January 1, 1880 and December 31, 1885, were \$87,959.13 ; while during Mr. VICKERS' term of six years these appropriations amounted to only \$10,949.73 more than that. Thus the latter purchased 65 per cent. more books with only 11 per cent. more money ; and the " net increase " of the Library was 83 per cent. greater. There were 70 per cent. more books presented to the Library, and 221 per cent. more deposited (3,513 volumes of which were also practically given), than under the present Librarian. The record in regard to the increase of pamphlets is of the same character : 8,758 under Mr. VICKERS ; only 3,379 under Mr. MERRILL. These facts speak for themselves ; they need no comment. Where some of the money from the " Book Fund " went to, which was diverted from its proper object under the present Librarian, we shall have occasion to point out when we come to consider his cataloguing enterprises.

III. THE EXPENSE OF MAINTENANCE.

As the external circulation of books is rapidly declining ; as the average annual addition of books to the Library, from all sources, is now only about half as large as it formerly was ; and as the work of cataloguing has necessarily diminished in the same ratio ; it would only be natural to expect a corresponding decrease of current expenditure in the administration. But the following table conclusively shows that while the efficiency of the Library is decreasing, the cost of running it has largely increased. The figures have been taken from the Annual Reports, and can easily be verified. They run with the library year, from July 1, to June 30.

ITEMS.		Total Expenses, 1874 — 1879.		Total Expenses, 1880 — 1885.
<i>I. Permanent Improvement, etc.</i>		\$315,849 09		\$313,284 46
1. Building, } Furniture, } Repairs, }	\$22,108 82	.....	\$8,674 74	
2. Books, } Binding & } Periodicals, }	99,439 95	.....	86,501 48	
3. Refund- } ing of De- } posits, The- } ol. Lib., &c. }	1,954 62	.....	1,200 49	
		124,503 39		96,376 71
<i>II. Current Expenses.</i>		191,345 70		216,907 75
1. Printing, } Supplies &c }	22,341 62	.....	19,282 60	
2. Gas and } Fuel. }	26,896 91	.....	27,671 94	
3. Insurance,	712 50	.....	1,033 40	
4. Salaries,	141,421 67	.....	168,919 81	
		191,345 70		\$216,907 75

In explanation of the larger item of expense for building, furniture, etc. during the first of these periods, it must be remembered that many of the rooms of the Library—for example, the present

delivery room, the newspaper reading room, the periodical reading room, the Librarian's room—were finished and furnished long after the main building was opened; that during this time the hydraulic engines proved to be a failure, and a 25 horse-power steam engine was built; that a steam pump had to be put in the basement to pump out the sewage; that the private iron stairway leading to the fourth story of the front building was torn out, and an elevator built in its place; that various book-lifts were constructed; that all the iron shutters at the College street end of the building had to be removed and differently adjusted; that all the skylights over the alcoves in the main hall had to be taken out on account of leakage, and a large expense incurred in replacing them by others; and that many other important permanent improvements were found necessary and had to be made.

But what possible justification there could be for an average annual increase of \$4,583.00 in salaries alone, during the last six years, it is difficult to see. There are, doubtless, mysteries connected with the management which none but the initiated can solve.

Having presented the foregoing facts concerning the use, the increase, and the expense of the library, we pass to the consideration of one or two other points.

I. THE CATALOGUE.

Under this head we include all that relates to the cataloguing department, as well as to the publication of the work done there. In his report for the year ending June 30, 1880, Mr. MERRILL said: "I should not advise the abandonment of the present excellent system of cataloguing." This must have been gratifying to the author of the system, Mr. MERRILL's predecessor; though if he had been thirsting after commendation, it had already come three years earlier from a somewhat higher authority in such matters than Mr. MERRILL. On the 9th of October, 1877, Mr. M. D. CONWAY wrote to the *Cincinnati Commercial* a letter in regard to the International Congress of Librarians which had just closed in London, in which occurred the following paragraph:

"It will be especially interesting to Cincinnatians to know that the Superintendent of the Reading Room of the British Museum warmly commended in open Conference the system of printed catalogues instituted by Mr. VICKERS in your city library, and signified his intention of immediately adopting it in the great institution over which he presides." (*See Cincinnati Commercial, October 25, 1877.*)

What Mr. Richard GARNETT, the gentleman to whom Mr. CONWAY referred, afterwards published in the "Transactions and Proceedings of the Conference of Librarians", contained the following, referring to the catalogues of the British Museum :

"I should therefore be inclined to recommend the preparation of an abridged classified index, *and its publication from time to time in sections severally complete in themselves, as affording the best means for a gradual solution of the problem.* Most of these sections, I have little doubt, would by their sale nearly repay the expense of publication, which a complete alphabetical catalogue of the library certainly would not. *These remarks, it will be perceived, coincide with those made yesterday by Mr. VICKERS, which struck me as eminently sensible and practical.*" (See Trans. pp. 113 and 157.)

The present Cincinnati Librarian was, of course, not to be blamed for sharing the opinion of such an authority as Mr. GARNETT; but unlike Mr. GARNETT, he preferred to act upon a different opinion. He advised, at least, a "temporary departure" from it in practice. He was impressed by the cry of a few for "a complete catalogue", as he doubtless would have been by the cry of the child who wanted "a whole pickled elephant", and wanted it "right off." At any rate, he imagined the whole pickled catalogue "could be prepared in a short time"—in six months, in a year at most. A year afterward (in his report for 1881) he informs the Board and the crying public that the pickling process "has progressed rapidly", and says that "the catalogue can be published during the coming year". The next following year, (in his report for 1882), he says: "The printing of the new Finding List has been commenced, and is being pushed as rapidly as possible." He had even made a contract with the printer, to print several "forms" each week under penalty of a considerable pecuniary forfeit; luckily for him, the printer had not been sharp enough to exact a forfeit of the Librarian for not furnishing copy as fast as it was needed, and not returning proof "with promptness and dispatch". A year later (in 1883), he is still in the same pickle, and with characteristic prevarication seeks to throw the blame upon the innocent printer. After another year, (in his report for 1884), he regretfully informs the infant terror, who is still in the agony of expectation, that "the *printing* of the new Finding List has been somewhat delayed." Then again, (in the report for 1885,) "the *publication* of the new Finding List was somewhat delayed by the unfortunate burning of the Masonic Temple"; but at last, snatched as it were from the very jaws of destruction, the long ex-

pected phænomenon is brought forth *in the sixth year* of its gestation! Six years of incessant toil (or shall we say of unceasing imbecility?) to produce what? — *partly, a printed copy of the library shelf-lists, and partly a reprint of catalogues that had recently been published by the Library*; and this at an expense, for work done outside of the Library, of *more than six thousand dollars*. What possible excuse could there be for re-printing the new catalogues of English, French, and German Fiction, which had been praised from one end of the land to the other, and beyond it, by cataloguers of experience, and of which there was no lack of copies in the Library? What other excuse than the desire to make a big book at whatever cost of personal honesty or the city's money, in order to give the impression that during all these years the Librarian had been doing something, when in reality he had been doing nothing or worse than nothing? For the utterly useless reproduction of the fiction catalogues (230 pages out of 721,) at such enormous expense; and the taking of money contrary to law, to pay for it, will probably be regarded by everybody as worse than doing nothing. The law expressly provides, that the library tax, when collected, shall be expended for the purchase of books; and yet the Librarian and Treasurer (for singularly enough, the Librarian is *now* also Treasurer,) reports that he has taken \$4,673.43 out of this fund to pay for printing his so-called Finding List! The present Librarian may plead that this also was a purchase of books; but even he would probably admit that the law would not authorize him to go to a bookstore and buy a thousand copies of one book at six dollars apiece, *with money out of the Library Book Fund, and then give the most of them away to his friends, or sell them again at one dollar apiece.*

But to return to the so-called "Finding List", which on its appearance must have struck with astonishment everyone familiar with library economy. A *finding list* in such style and with such pretensions! A "finding list" is generally understood to be a *cheap and handy substitute for a catalogue*, which will show in the briefest possible way, without repetition of titles, what books a library contains (at the time of printing) until a regular catalogue can be prepared. Such a list (had it been necessary) could have been prepared in one-third of the time taken by Mr. MERRILL, and published at one-sixth of the expense of the present book, which is neither finding list nor catalogue—as a catalogue an abortion, as a finding list an absurdity. For a finding list (a thing essentially temporary in its

character and purpose) the style in which it is gotten up is on a par with putting a fifty dollar binding on a dime novel, or enshrining a volume of the Seaside Library in velvet and gold. As a systematic catalogue it is based entirely upon the shelf-lists and upon the Subject Index (printed in 1879, which is also here reprinted,) with the making of which the present Librarian had nothing at all to do, and which he had neither the culture nor the training to enable him to utilize. For there is scarcely a page where it was possible for illiteracy to blunder, on which the most ridiculous blunders are not to be found. The list of *corrigenda* (blunders that were discovered after the printing) occupies 14 columns, and almost rivals some of the celebrated lists of errata mentioned by Mr. H. B. WHEATLEY in his book on Indexes. But what of the blunders which the present Librarian did not discover, which betray not merely want of care, but "the fatal ease" (to use his own phrase) with which dense ignorance of literature and language can make mistakes! And yet it almost seems as though he thought he was erecting an honorable monument to himself, for *he had the thing stereotyped*; and should he continue as Librarian and Treasurer he would doubtless have it reprinted from time to time (with money which the law sets apart for the increase of the Library) for distribution among those with whom it would be useful to him to make friends.

But the so-called Finding List is not the only fraud which the present Librarian has perpetrated on the public in his cataloguing enterprises. We come now to the so-called bulletins of *new* books, that is, to be specific, to the annual "Bulletins of Books in the various Departments of Literature and Science *added* to the Public Library of Cincinnati *during the years 1883, 1884, and 1885*"; or, in other words, during those years in which the Librarian was taking money from the fund for the purchase of books, in order to pay for printing his nondescript catalogue. Under the circumstances, it is a very interesting question to ask, are these really bulletins of *new* books, or of books "*added to the Library*" in those years? Before answering this question we may remark that each of these bulletins contains just half the number of pages which the bulletin for 1879, the last published by Mr. MERRILL's predecessor, contained. And as the present Librarian acquired only about half the number of books for the Library, this may seem natural; but as nearly two-thirds of the whole number were acquired previous to the years in question, not even half the number of bulletin pages were necessary for the rest. What were they filled with? *Largely with the titles*

of books that had been in the Library five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, and some of them ever since it was first organized. The following table shows the proportion of such old books in these bulletins :

Bulletin.	New Books.	Old Books.	Percentage of old.
1883	2,383 vols.	1,191 vols.	33 per cent.
1884	1,798 "	1,525 "	45 per cent.
1885	1,823 "	1,180 "	39 per cent.

But we must make an end of this subject. For six and a half years the present Librarian has utterly neglected to proceed with the catalogues that are lying partly printed in the hands of the printer (if "the unfortunate burning of the Masonic Temple" did not wipe them out of existence) ; such as the catalogue of "Medicine and Allied Sciences." What he *has* done is to print a "pickled elephant" finding list, (with money that ought by law to have gone to the increase of the Library,) in order to make people think he has been at work ; and to publish stuffed bulletins of alleged new additions, 39 per cent of which are no new additions at all, in order to make the public believe that the customary number of books have been bought.

We turn now to another point which may be disposed of briefly.

II. THE DETERIORATION OF THE BOOKS.

Everyone with experience in such matters knows that the ordinary wear and tear of books in a public library in a city like Cincinnati is very great ; and that the Librarian can not be too watchful over books that circulate, if he would prevent damage that is practically irreparable. It is, however, not only from the hands of readers that damage results. An incessant inspection of the shelves and repositories is indispensable to prevent destruction. Not merely the eye and hand of the janitor or alcove-cleaner, but the conscientious personal vigilance and superintendence of the Librarian himself are absolutely necessary. Of this there has been nothing in our Public Library under the present administration. In the Main Hall thousands of books, which are not in frequent use, are absolutely going to pieces with dry rot upon the shelves. Valuable books lie in all directions without even the attempt to keep them in proper position. Some three years ago a gentleman who had occasion to consult some old newspapers in the repository above the principal hall, found

many of them (including some presented when the Library was first formed, by Mr. J. D. CALDWELL, which could not now be duplicated for love or money,) scattered around upon the floor, torn, and in a disgracefully filthy condition, instead of being upon the shelves. No real librarian ever saw such a spectacle in an institution over which he had control. Under competent supervision such things *can not* occur. At present there is no supervision. Equally apparent is

III. THE DETERIORATION OF THE SERVICE.

The Librarian has, under the rules, full control of all his assistants ; and, if he has the interest of the Library at heart, he must see to it that they are competent for the positions they hold, and that they do their duty in them. But, on the other hand, he necessarily stands to them not only in the relation of a superior, but of a protector and friend. Between them and the public there is constant necessity for mediation. And even with the best Board of Managers there are cases when great injustice will be done, unless the Librarian has the moral courage to interfere and prevent it. Under Mr. MERRILL's predecessor a number of rules were made by the Board of Managers, at his suggestion, to insure some preparatory training of persons who were to be appointed to positions in the Library ; to grade the service, and fix a regular increase of compensation up to a certain point ; and also to insure the regular promotion of those already in the service, and having experience, when vacancies occurred. This gave the Library a certain character, and gave confidence to those engaged in it, that faithful discharge of duties would be recognized. But where is all this now ? Where ? When has the present Librarian ever been known to resist the perpetration of injustice upon his assistants ? Whenever any one of the force has needed a friend, he has always had to be sought outside of the Library. No library assistant is now sure of anything ; for there is no telling to what new combinations and necessities the Librarian may feel himself compelled to submit. All professional ambition, all desire to excel, all *esprit de corps*, have been ruthlessly stamped out ; and it is perfectly natural that the chief desire should now be to get through with the day's work as comfortably as possible, and to continue to draw one's salary with becoming regularity. This is the spirit which has descended from the head to the members.

But what can a Librarian do who is the bond-slave, nay, the willing tool of any unscrupulous person upon whose vote he happens to be dependent ; who, with an instinct in that direction, seems to be ready to do any dirty work which may be demanded of him ; who

permits himself to be addressed with the vilest and most approbrious epithets within the precincts of his power? Perhaps, one should not expect too much of a man in the office of Librarian who is an acknowledged authority on "poker", but a patent ignoramus in literature.

No such instance of inefficiency and incapacity has ever been known in the history of our educational institutions. A great library, the largest public library but one in the United States, was transferred to his charge, well-nigh perfect in all its appointments; furnished with every appliance that ingenuity could suggest to lighten and expedite labor; increasing in popularity and usefulness with every succeeding year; with a corps of trained assistants (in all departments) numerous beyond necessity; with the control of a princely fund for the enrichment of its stores from year to year; a position of power and influence all made to his hands, second to none in educational importance and equal to any in responsibility; and what has he done with it? He has frittered and fooled it away. He has transfused his own notorious slothfulness into the very blood and marrow of the institution, and suffered disorder and decay to seize upon its every department.

If the most flagrant incompetency in the administration of public office ever furnished sufficient ground for the removal of the incumbent, *without the necessity of resorting to the discipline of political parties*, here is one about which there can be no question when the facts herein laid bare are duly considered.

What has thus far been presented concerns the internal organization and general efficiency of the Public Library as an educational instrumentality, for which the Librarian is primarily responsible. There are other things, which will be discussed in a subsequent number, for which the Board of Managers must bear the responsibility.

And now, what is the remedy?

No person of ordinary reflection can fail to see, after what has been said, that the remedy can not come from a mere change of librarians; or that the change which is necessary must be made from other than political motives. The committee, which has felt it a duty to make the foregoing presentation, is composed of members of both political parties, and they believe that both parties have an

equal interest in the welfare of our common system of public education, and they believe that any other theory is fraught with the greatest danger. They can not refrain from quoting at this point the words of a man who was for thirteen years president of the Board of Education. They are the concluding words of his report, as such, for the year 1857, and are not less necessary to be enforced to-day than they were then :

“If our people desire to preserve and perpetuate the Common School system as a blessing, they will *subdue all selfish, private, or party considerations*, and adhere firmly to the just and accurate provisions calculated to work out its salutary ends.”

RUFUS KING.

In the matter before us, nothing can be more certain that a second mistake like the one made in the selection of the present Librarian, would be fatal to one of the noblest of our educational institutions. The city can not afford to try doubtful experiments with it. Even the greatest artist can not carve a statue of Mercury out of every block of wood ; nor can you make a Public Librarian even out of every educated man, to say nothing of the uneducated. A man may be even a successful merchant, and have no aptitude for such duties ; an unsuccessful one has already proved himself wanting in some of the necessary qualifications. A man may be a good political schemer and intriguer, but such qualities are not particularly adapted to library uses. That a man may be an impecunious ne'er-do-weel, a lawyer by profession, and have no vocation to administer a great library, need not be further urged. Finally, there are plenty of legitimate objects of political ambition for gentlemen who have rendered services to their party worthy of recognition ; *but the librarianship of the Public Library is not one of them.*

APPENDIX.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

Editorial from the Cincinnati Commercial, October 22, 1871.

It is not uncommon, even among persons of considerable education, to hear public libraries spoken of as eminently modern institutions,—indeed as one of the outgrowths and distinguishing characteristics of the Christian civilization. As a matter of fact, the public library is an institution of very great antiquity; one of fairest fruits of heathen culture. We find them in ancient Egypt, in Persia, in Greece and Rome. The Emperor AUGUSTUS, during whose reign the founder of the Christian religion was born, established two large public libraries in the city of Rome; and in the fourth century this number, as we are told by PUBLIUS VICTOR, who describes the city at that period, had increased to twenty-eight, exclusive of those under strictly private control. So the astonishing cultivation of knowledge among the Arabs in Spain is most thoroughly authenticated by the fact that in the twelfth century they had founded seventy public libraries, that at Cordova alone containing over two hundred and fifty thousand volumes.

Of course these libraries, although public, were not used by the whole people, but only by those whose previous culture made such use possible to them; by the "clerks"—persons who knew how to read and write. The clerks, however, in many periods belonged for the most part to the clergy, the priesthood, as the words themselves indicate. Intellectual culture was all but monopolized by the men connected with religious offices. The *Renaissance*, the new birth of literature and science, which followed upon the fall of Constantinople, introduced a period which gradually put an end to all this. In modern times, since the Reformation, intellectual culture is no longer the exclusive possession of a caste; it tends more and more to become the property of the whole people. The establishment of a common school laid the foundation for general education. And it is the existence of the common school which gives the public library of to-day, in contrast with those of former times, its wider scope and its incalculably more powerful influence.

Next to the public school, it may be fairly asserted, there is no public institution that is of greater importance to the community than the public library. After republican society has, through the instrumentality of the common school, instructed its children in the elementary branches of education; after it has imparted that minimum of instruction which is necessary to its safety, and which it therefore has the right to demand in every instance, and the corresponding duty to provide for; it establishes its public library, and says to all who thirst after higher and wider culture: "Here is the fountain of knowledge; come and drink!"

No higher school education which the State can provide will reach directly more than a very small per centum of the people. The exigencies of life compel the withdrawal of the great mass of the children from school at an early age. Their education does not necessarily cease with this event, but it ceases to be under

State supervision or control. This is natural, inevitable, and no potitical artifice can prevent it. All that society can do in the premises is to encourage the effort toward further culture in connection with the business of life to which the child is called after leaving school. This it can do in no other way so effectually as through the free public library, where it strives to collect, so far as practicable, the whole body of useful literature, and places it at the disposal of all comers, subject to such regulations only as are necessary to its preservation, and to the securing of its benefits equally to all.

The public library, then, is the natural supplement to the public school. It is the people's university. There are no tiresome and impossible examinations for admission to it, and no prescribed hours of study—its benefits are within the reach of all who can read. It is the only real *universitas literarum*, where the whole republic of learning can be represented—the only real *studium generale*, where the whole domain of letters lies at the feet of the eager and industrious.

As a supplementary means of education, furnished by the State, many of the public libraries of our country have grown up in direct connection with the public school; and it is natural and proper that they should be under the control of educational boards and committees. This is the history of the Public Library of Cincinnati, which, from its inception in 1856, as the "Ohio School Library," has been intimately connected with the schools, and in charge of our city Board of Education. And certainly there is no part of our educational system which, on the whole, does us more honor. Probably no one will claim that it has always been managed with supreme wisdom, either as to the building or as to the persons intrusted with the selection and care of the books. But, in spite of the fact that many great blunders have been made, and much serious, unnecessary expense incurred, the Library stands to-day an ornament and a credit to our city and a blessing to its inhabitants. And when the main building is finished, and room thus given for proper arrangement and expansion, it will, through a wise disposition of the funds at the disposal of the management, become the great centre of education in this community. It is said that over the entrance to the library of the temple in ancient Thebes stood the inscription: "IATREION PSYCHES"—a place of healing for the soul," or "the dwelling of the soul's physician." Who knows to how many whom the toils and cares of life make sick at heart, this library of ours may become a place for their soul's healing—a place where, through communion with the great masters of thought and expression, they may find that solace which at the same time enriches and enlarges the mind?

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR?

Editorial from the Cincinnati News Journal, August 5th, 1883.

As a matter of fact, people everywhere have more or less confused ideas in regard to the object and the management of public libraries. We will, therefore, try to contribute something toward a better understanding of the matter.

We proceed upon the principle that a public library, which is maintained and conducted by means of a general tax, exists *for the people*. What do we mean by the people? We mean the whole people, high and low, rich and poor, aristocrat and proletarian, narrow-minded and liberal, wrong-headed and right-headed, learned and unlearned — no one is shut out, no matter what his conduct of life or his philosophy of life may be. All pay taxes, directly or indirectly, for the support of the Library, and all have an unquestionable right to be heard in regard to it. The administration of a public library must understand first of all, that all classes of the people desire to read. In the United States this is an undeniable fact. And then, every one wishes to work out his literary salvation in his own way. Each individual wants to select his intellectual nutriment according to his own needs. Each demands what most nearly corresponds to his own taste, intelligence, and inclinations. From this it follows incontrovertibly that the table must be spread for everybody, for all. An institution, which owes its existence to a liberal idea of the people, must be organized and managed in that sense. Originating in the liberality of the people, the conditions of its existence must not be put in jeopardy by a narrow, fanatical, or exclusive management. We say, therefore, emphatically: Render unto the people the things that belong to the people.

To have regard for the will of the people; to have also a clear conception of his own position; to make it as easy as possible for those who visit the institution to profit by it; to do justice to the needs of readers by the best possible selection of books — this is the office of the Librarian, the incumbent of which should certainly be an expert in such matters. An infallible criterion of the Librarian's capability is to be found in the books he selects for purchase. The quality as well as the quantity of the books bought must be determined by the experienced librarian, whose tact and insight, combined with literary and bibliographical knowledge and liberal views, will keep him in the right path.

And now, as to the kind of books to be bought for a public library, we have the experience of all the experts. The number of belletristic works borrowed and read at home, as compared with others, averages according to all statistical reports, about 80 per cent.; while the remaining 20 per cent. are divided between the departments of philosophy, philology, theology, law, medicine, natural science, history, biography, and the like. Therefore, in virtue of the principle above laid down, the needs of the reading public should be cared for in something like this proportion; and all the more from the fact that experience teaches that scarcely one-fifth of the readers follow any scientific calling or represent its demands upon the library. The politico-economical formula for these facts would be something like this: The tax paying reading public is represented in the Public Library by 80 per cent of belletristic and 20 per cent of scientific literature. The Librarian, entrusted with the expenditure of the sum annually set apart for the purchase of books, would have, strictly speaking, to govern himself by this proportion; and especially since he knows that the readers of light literature, forming as they do

four-fifths of the reading public, guarantee the continued existence of the library and render the acquisition of scientific works in sufficient number possible.

An example from actual experience will illustrate this assertion. A friend of our Cincinnati Public Library, belonging to one of the learned professions, wished to consult a single volume of a certain mathematical work, in connection with some literary labor on which he was engaged. The Library did not possess the work, but procured it at considerable outlay, in order to accommodate the gentleman in question; who, when he received it, remarked that the Library ought to furnish books of that character *exclusively*, and that all novels ought to be removed from it. Manifestly, this very learned gentleman did not comprehend that it was the multitude of novel-readers (whose tastes happily can be satisfied at very moderate expense) that enabled the officers of the Library to purchase the mathematical work, for his special benefit, at an expense of \$125.

This, however, is not the only reason for the retention of light literature in public libraries. Under the term "literature" are comprehended *all* the literary productions of the human mind. The earliest subject of literary activity was the poetic representation of important historical persons and events. This was called epic poetry, of which there are several species, and one of them is the Romance or Novel, the modern epos in prose. Most sensible persons have come to understand the importance of the novel as a means of education; what the epopee is for a people, the novel is for the individual. With SACHER MASOCH we say: "The highest form of poetry will always be that in which the poet is able to present to us the world of nature and of man most completely; and this for us is the novel, the epic of the present, which extends over a larger domain of artistic representation than either lyric or dramatic poetry has ever comprehended." We say, therefore, with all emphasis, that the romance, the novel, the story belong to the most important creations of human thought; and this for the simple reason, that this branch of literature attracts the great mass of mankind, creates in them a taste for reading, which is then gradually expanded and purified.

And why, we ask in conclusion, should this class of literature be excluded from public libraries? Because it is offensive to some few crabbed and censorious (would-be) moralists? Or, because a certain literary rabble is employed in fabricating shallow, senseless, and often morally reprehensible novels with lightning rapidity, in order to supply the demand for such trash? Anxious souls of both sexes may confidentially leave this matter *to the experienced librarian* and to time. As the taste of the reading public gradually improves under the influence of the better class of authors, this trumpery literature will be left behind. The tone, the tact, the wants of readers, and the direction of reading, can not be controlled by prohibitory measures. Moreover, a public library is not a branch of the public police. Let the direction of such an institution be put with all confidence into the hands of a Librarian of experience, who is at once liberal and conservative in his views, and leave the development of his plan to time. Care has been taken that no man can go beyond his tether; and on the other hand, honest endeavor and unwearying industry seldom fail in remedying defects and imperfections. Time is the great, gentle, unfailing reformer, who helps us to garner the rich and ever-returning harvest of philanthropy. Once more, therefore, the admonition: Let the educational institutions of the State not be disturbed by sinister economical projects, which are invented only for the purpose of undermining them and destroying their usefulness.